

State of Connecticut

GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PERMANENT COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

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Testimony of
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Before the
Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
Tuesday, March 8, 2005

In Support of:

R.B. 1098 AAC The Professionalization of the Early Childhood Education Workforce

RB 6859 AAC A Career Ladder Program for Education Paraprofessionals and Loan Forgiveness For Teachers

Good morning Sen. Hartley, Rep. Willis and members of the committee. My name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Associate Legislative Analyst of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in favor of two bills before you, which we hope, would greatly improve the economic situation of women in female-dominated occupations.

R.B. 1098 AAC The Professionalization of the Early Childhood Education Workforce

PCSW urge your support of RB 1098 which would establish a committee to review access to early child education or child development programs.

PCSW has recently become involved in the issue of early childhood education from the perspective of achieving pay equity for female-dominated

professions such as early care and education. As you know, professionals in the field of early care and education perform the most important work – caring for and beginning the education of our youngest children – and yet are paid very low wages, and rarely receive benefits. We think this is unfair to the workers, and also diminishes the quality of care and education provided to children. We also focus on the issue of early care and education from the perspective of working parents who need a high quality, safe and affordable program for their young children so that they can go to work.

There are several collaborative efforts, many of which we participate in, to improve the Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce:

- The Connecticut Career Ladder Advisory Committee, which we co-chair with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, issued a report identifying continued workforce shortages and challenges in ECE and cited the struggle between low wages, turnover, quality of care and parental affordability.
- CT Charts-A-Course, which provides ECE scholarships.
- Early Childhood Partners which is proposing a statewide coordinated effort to foster increased credentials and qualifications for ECE teachers.
- The State Department of Social Services, which requires accreditation for state centers.
- The State Department of Education that established teacher credentials in School Readiness Programs.
- The State Department of Public Health that proposed new regulations regarding teacher credentials in licensed centers.
- The Governor's Early Childhood Agenda, which proposes funding for scholarships for professional development and career advancement.

There is a vision in the state to have a qualified ECE workforce, who is properly compensated. The committee proposed in this bill could be the “glue” to “gel” this vision, which is greatly needed in our currently fragmented system.

Yet, we do not want to lose sight of one important factor in shaping this vision – that we must *tie further education and credentialing of professionals with increased wages and benefits*. It is unfair and unrealistic to ask working professionals to dedicate the time and effort required to obtain an Associates or Bachelors Degree without any expectation that their compensation will reflect their increased qualifications. Moreover, experience has shown that increasing the qualifications *and* the compensation for early care and education professionals reduces the otherwise high turnover rate in this field, resulting in better outcomes for children. This is a “win-win” for children, working parents, early care and education professionals, and the community – but we need to invest the funds up front to realize the gain. Therefore, we respectfully request that you consider adding an appointee that would represent the needs and experiences of workers in the profession, as the current committee composition is stacked with appointees from the state Department of Education, faculty of

higher education institutions, and ECE professionals, who will be rightfully focused on the goal of ensuring adequate professional credentials.

RB 6859 AAC A Career Ladder Program for Education Paraprofessionals and Loan Forgiveness For Teachers

PCSW also supports RB 6859, which would develop a career ladder program for school paraprofessionals.

The paraprofessional field, like early care and education, is a female-dominated occupation that is inequitable in both pay and pensions. Paraprofessionals, who often assist teachers with special needs children, earn the same as janitors in the same school system, and \$2,500 less than landscaping and groundskeeping workers.¹ “Career ladder” programs have worked successfully in other states. They create a working “pipeline” of employees prepared for certain occupations, and they help low wage workers gain new skills and improve their earning capacities.

We look forward to working with members of this Committee to advance the goal of providing high quality, affordable education to all children in our state, and recruiting and retaining high quality, fairly compensated professionals in this field. Thank you.

¹ Average wages of: Teacher’s Assistants \$24,118; Janitors \$24,122, and; Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers \$26,638. *CT Occupational Employment Wages, Statewide*. CT Department of Labor, November 18, 2004, available at www.ct.dol.state.ct.us.

